THE POLITICAL WORLD OF THOMAS WENTWORTH, EARL OF STRAFFORD, 1621–1641

EDITED BY

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INTRODUCTION

The historical reputation of Thomas Wentworth

J. F. Merritt

The name of Thomas Wentworth has always loomed large in accounts of seventeenth-century England. He was a controversial man in his own time, and in the work of subsequent historians his reputation has proved similarly controversial. The basic facts of his career are well known and undisputed. Born in 1593, the eldest son of a leading Yorkshire gentry family, privileges and responsibilities were swiftly loaded upon him. Knighted at the age of eighteen, he went on the Grand Tour immediately afterwards, and sat in his first parliament at the age of twenty-one, becoming second baronet and head of the family in the same year. In the 1620s he regularly attended Parliament, but his political career did not make further progress. In 1627 he was imprisoned in the Marshalsea for six weeks after refusing to pay the Forced Loan, and was dismissed from his offices of Justice of the Peace and Custos Rotulorum. In 1628 he played a major role in Parliament and encouraged the Petition of Right, but later in the same year he was appointed President of the Council in the North, and was appointed a privy councillor in the following year. In 1632 his political star rose still further when he was appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland, in which position he embarked upon a vigorous policy of building up his power. With the outbreak of war with the Scots, Wentworth became the king's most valued minister, summoned back to England, created earl of Strafford, and entrusted with a prominent role in the conduct of the so-called Bishops' Wars. After the collapse of the Second Bishops' War and the calling of the Long Parliament, Strafford soon found himself impeached for high treason. His trial dominated the political events of the early months of 1641 and led to tumultuous picketing of the House of Lords, which finally voted in favour of a bill of attainder. King Charles, despite earlier promises to Strafford that he would protect him,

succumbed under pressure and gave his assent to the bill. On 12 May 1641, in the presence of a vast crowd, the earl of Strafford was executed on Tower Hill.

Beyond the broad outlines of Wentworth's career, however, historians have found little area for agreement. At Wentworth's trial, the prosecution and defence fought over the interpretation of every aspect of his troubled career. Not surprisingly, then, these arguments gave rise to sharply polarised views of the combative Lord Deputy. They were also a necessary by-product of the legal process, although much subsequent historical scholarship has tended to adopt a similar approach. Inevitably, later political divisions, formed in the aftermath of the Civil War, also meant that Whig and Tory commentators lined up for or against Strafford, as they did with regard to Charles I or Cromwell. In most interpretations of Strafford's life, then, writers have sought to understand his career by asking a series of either/or questions. On his conduct in the 1620s, they have asked if Wentworth was a man of principle, seeking to establish effective government. Or was he instead a political apostate, deserting his erstwhile parliamentary colleagues and the principles of the Petition of Right in return for the lure of office and power within what was to become an increasingly authoritarian government? Was there, in other words, a 'change of sides'? Wentworth's role in the politics of the 1630s has been construed in similarly polarised terms. Was he the king's chief minister, urging him along absolutist and unparliamentary courses? Or was he a dedicated and effective administrator, unappreciated by intriguing courtiers, working selflessly to safeguard the king's power, but still cherishing his earlier hopes for a peaceful and consensualist political nation?

Strafford's government in Ireland has similarly served as a battlefield for Whig and Tory historians. Was it, as his opponents claimed, a laboratory for absolutist ideas that would then be implemented in England? Or were these unique policies for what was by tradition a uniquely governed country? Was Strafford's government a potential success that was rudely cut short by the Scottish troubles? Or was it doomed from the beginning – a set of misguided policies which hastened rather than delayed the Irish Rebellion that erupted in 1641? The pathos of Strafford's final trial and execution has also prompted historians to investigate the validity of the charges against him and to ask just what it was that Strafford died for.

Undoubtedly, Wentworth's legacy has been a complex and ambiguous one. For Whigs seeking to emphasise the power of parliaments, the figure of Wentworth looms large in parliamentary debates during which some of the most cherished principles of constitutional liberty were supposedly proclaimed. But is his later association with the government of the Personal Rule to be conceived as a desertion of his principles, or as evidence that he had never been sincere in holding them? For royalists and later Tories, Wentworth represented a similarly ambiguous inheritance. After all, to the minds of the so-called 'constitutional royalists', Strafford stood for many of the most hated and arbitrary aspects of the Personal Rule – the patron saints of the later 'Tory' tradition, such as Hyde and Falkland, were determined in their condemnation of Wentworth in 1641. But the apparent injustice of Wentworth's attainder and execution made it particularly tempting for later royalists to portray this as the first crime of a parliamentary absolutism that would lead in natural progression to the execution of the king. In addition, Wentworth's exemplary conduct at his trial and his honourable behaviour on the scaffold have all endeared him to royalist opinion in subsequent ages as a martyr – not of royal absolutism – but of honest service to the crown in the face of popular radicalism and puritan fanaticism.

This essay explores how writers and historians have constructed the set of questions brought to bear on Strafford's career, and how other factors, particularly the varying availability of primary sources, have contributed to changing interpretations of Strafford's career, and of the political world in which he lived.[1]

I

The first assessments that were made of Strafford after his death were understandably most preoccupied with his death on the scaffold. These tragic circumstances were not lost on observers, the

I am grateful to Anthony Milton for his comments on a draft of this chapter.

[1] A number of brief surveys of the historiography of aspects of Strafford's career have been published: see, for example, Hugh Kearney, *Strafford in Ireland: A Study in Absolutism* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1989), pp. xi–xxviii and *ibid.* (1st edn, Manchester, (1959), pp. xxxiii–xxxviii, on Strafford's Irish policies, or P. Zagorin, 'Did Strafford change sides?', *English Historical Review* 101 (1986), pp. 152–5, on his career in the later 1620s. The present essay does not attempt a comprehensive survey, but concentrates on some of the lesser-known but often most influential interpretations of Strafford's career. I am currently working on a more detailed analysis of perceptions of Strafford in the period 1641–89.

conventions of classical tragedy shaping how contemporaries regarded him. During his own lifetime, even Wentworth had compared himself to Caesar, assassinated by his enemies, and his conduct at his trial and execution bore not a little trace of his attachment to Stoicism.[2] This was recognised even by his opponents. Lady Brilliana Harley, commenting on Strafford's noble bearing at his execution, noted that he 'dyed like a Senneca', but could not resist the qualification that this conduct was 'not like one that had tasted the mistery of godlyness'.[3] Early accounts of Strafford's fall were quick to identify classical parallels. Sir Richard Fanshawe's 'On the Earle of Straffords Tryall' followed Wentworth in comparing his trial to the assassination of Caesar, and the Interregnum playwright, Cosmo Manuche, wrote an English translation of Plautus' *The Captives* relating to the fall of Strafford. Abraham Wright's more favourable account of Strafford's trial and execution rendered the events in Tacitean Latin, reflecting that, while Strafford's fall was not inferior to that of the admired old Romans, his surviving fame and glory were in every way superior and more noble still. Strafford also appeared, inevitably, in the role of Coriolanus in the 'playlet' *Mercurius Britannicus*.[4]

Obviously, Strafford could be clothed in the garb of a range of classical models: if Wright saw him as a classical hero, then Thomas May could compare him with the dictator Sulla.[5] But classical writings were not simply a supermarket of stereotypes to be plundered; the conventions of classical tragedy also exercised an important influence over the ways in which Strafford's contemporaries described and assessed his character and interpreted his fate. Just like Elizabeth's favourite, the earl of Essex, Strafford could be

2 T. Ranger, 'Strafford in Ireland: a revaluation', in T. Aston (ed.), *Crisis in Europe 1560–1660* (1965), pp. 281–2. On Wentworth's Stoicism, see Knowler, II, 39; K. Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (1992), p. 235. See also Richard Cust's reflections in chapter 3 below. The latter part of Wentworth's travel diary (Str P 30) contains many extracts from works discussing the figure of Cato.

3 *Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley*, ed. T. Lewis (Camden Society 1st ser., vol. 58, 1854), p. 131. Note also Richard Brathwaite's later description of Strafford reading Seneca 'on the tranquillity of the mind' when told of the king's assent to his execution: Wedgwood, p. 398.

4 N. Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640–1660* (New Haven, 1994), pp. 278, 86, 341; Abraham Wright, 'Novissima Straffordii', ed. and trans. J. Wright, *Roxburghe Club Historical Papers* (1846), p. 58; [Richard Brathwaite], *Mercurius Britannicus* (1641). See also M. Butler, 'A case study of Caroline political theatre: Brathwaite's "Mercurius Britannicus" (1641)', *HJ* 27 (1984), pp. 947–53.

5 Smith, *Literature*, p. 343.

made to fit the classical model of a tragic hero who overreaches himself and falls due to his own ambition. The fact that Strafford's friends and contemporaries, such as Sir George Radcliffe, Clarendon and Sir Philip Warwick, reached instinctively for such classical models in their accounts of his character and failings has meant that these models have exercised a strong (though often unacknowledged) influence over later historians' depictions of him.[6]

The outbreak of the Civil War so soon after Strafford's own execution inevitably polarised depictions of the earl. Parliamentarian writers were eager to sustain the justice of the charges made against Strafford at his trial. However, it is interesting to note that, while anti-Strafford pamphleteers might seek to depict Laud and Wentworth as partners in crime, there were few attempts to depict Wentworth's threat in religious form. There was no real equivalent in anti-Strafford materials of the anti-papal satire aimed at Laud in countless popular pamphlets. But if charges of crypto-popery were few, Strafford's posthumous opponents did not hesitate to charge him with another form of religious heterodoxy – that of atheism. Several parliamentarian writers asserted that Wentworth was an avid student of Machiavelli.[7]

Pamphlets that directly attacked Wentworth after the outbreak of the war were infrequent. After his execution Wentworth no longer constituted a personal threat, and his usefulness as a scapegoat for Charles's policies inevitably diminished. The continued parliamentarian attacks on Wentworth that did emerge were prompted in part by royalist championing of him as the first royalist martyr. The publication in 1647 of a royalist account of Strafford's trial and execution, the *Briefe and Perfect Relation of the Answers... of the Earl of Strafford*, placed the trial again at the centre of royalist/parliamentarian polemical exchanges. The need to vindicate the proceedings against Strafford therefore required that he be painted in the blackest possible colours. Thus when Milton went on the attack and described Wentworth as 'a man whom all men look'd upon as one of the boldest and most impetuous instruments that the King had to

6 Many examples could be cited here. But for striking examples of how rhetorically constructed accounts have been treated by historians as objective historical evidence, see C. V. Wedgwood's comments on the *historical* value of Wright's *Novissima Straffordii* and Richard Brathwaite's *Panthalia*: Wedgwood, pp. 353, 398.

7 F. Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli* (1964), pp. 121, 131n, 167. Similarly, satirical woodcuts of Wentworth are scarce, whereas the figure of Laud could tap into a rich seam of anti-clerical feeling.

advance any violent or illegal designe', he was directly responding to the canonisation of Strafford in Charles's *Eikon Basilike*.

Even in the *Eikon Basilike*, however, the royalist view of Wentworth was not an unambiguous one. While Charles's remorse for yielding to the attainder of Strafford was a central preoccupation of his later years, it is interesting however to note that the discussion of Strafford in the *Eikon Basilike* is not a uniformly approving one. Charles was famously made to say that he had looked upon Strafford 'as a Gentleman, whose great abilities might make a Prince rather afraid, then ashamed to employ him, in the greatest affairs of State', and continued in reserved fashion that 'I cannot in My judgement approve all he did, driven (it may be) by the necessities of times, and the Temper of that People, more then led by his own disposition to any height and rigor of actions.'[8] As we have seen, the most important point in the royalist account of Strafford was not the defence of his ideas or policies, which seemed so out of harmony with the ideals of the *Answer to the Nineteen Propositions*. Instead they emphasised the manifest injustice that had been done to him by those who had subsequently sought the ruin of the king and his followers. His trial portentously marked the beginning of a ruinous parliamentary tyranny, of which Strafford had been the first of many victims.

Wentworth's role as martyr and emblem of the royalist cause was given an added lustre at the Restoration, when, alongside the restoration of the king, the Cavalier Parliament reversed Strafford's attainder and directed that all records and proceedings of Parliament relating to it should be 'wholly cancelled and taken out of the Fyle, or otherwayes defaced and obliterated'.[9] It was entirely fitting, then, that when Civil War memories and divisions were revived during the Exclusion Crisis, Strafford's status as royalist martyr was again prominent, encapsulated in the publication in 1679 of an account of his trial and execution. The battle over the trial continued with a vengeance during the following years. The ex-civil servant of the Protectorate, John Rushworth, published his enormous documentary account of Strafford's trial in 1680, basing it in part on notes that he

[8] Kearney, *Strafford*, 2nd edn, p. xii (quoting from Milton's *Eikonoklastes*); *Eikon Basilike* (Wing E311: 1649), pp. 5–6.

[9] However, while the relevant passages in the Lords Journal were defaced, they were not wholly erased: P. Christianson, 'The "obliterated" portions of the House of Lords Journals dealing with the attainder of Strafford, 1641', *English Historical Review* 95 (1980), pp. 339–53.

himself had taken at the trial. Where Rushworth claimed to reserve judgement on where justice lay in the trial, John Nalson's *Impartial Collection of the Great Affairs of State*, published in 1682, had no such qualms. This was a work given explicit royal patronage, and it included a very detailed and highly partisan account of Strafford's trial which was intended to join battle directly with the account given by Rushworth.[10]

Rushworth himself was surprisingly charitable in his comments on Wentworth, but Nalson provided the most effusive and uncritical account of Wentworth's career that had so far appeared in print.[11] Other royalist accounts of Wentworth that appeared towards the end of the seventeenth century were rather more qualified in their praise. Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion* presented him as a flawed individual: 'a man of great parts, and extraordinary endowments of nature', but spoiled in part by his early success, which 'applied to a nature too elate and arrogant of himself' made him proud and disdainful towards other men. Like so many other writers, Clarendon ultimately had recourse to a classical author – in this case Plutarch – to provide the epitaph to his sketch of a man notorious 'in doing good to his friends... [and] in doing evil to his enemies'.

Sir Philip Warwick's *Memoires*, published in 1701, presented a similar portrait. Again, Strafford's political failure rested on personal shortcomings. He was a man of high abilities, but tainted by 'a sowre and haughty temper' and 'a roughnes in his nature'. He had himself to blame in generating so many implacable enemies, especially at court: 'It was a great infirmity in him, that he seem'd to overlooke so many, as he did; since every where, much more in Court, the numerous or lesser sort of attendants can obstruct, create jealousies, spread ill reports, and do harme... there a little friendlines and opennes of carriage begets hope, and lessens envy.' Warwick also repeated contemporary rumour that Strafford's quarrel with Lord

[10] *An impartial account of the arraignment, trial and condemnation of Thomas late Earle of Strafford* (1679); R. C. Richardson, *The Debate on the English Revolution* (1977), p. 17; John Rushworth, *The Tryal of Thomas Earl of Strafford* (1680); John Nalson, *Impartial Collection of the Great Affairs of State from the Beginning of the Scotch Rebellion in the Year 1639 to the Murder of King Charles I* (2 vols., 1682–3), II, 1–210. On the importance of reflections on the 1640s during the Exclusion Crisis, see J. Scott, 'England's troubles: exhuming the Popish plot' in T. Harris, P. Seaward and M. Goldie (eds.), *The Politics of Religion in Restoration England* (Oxford, 1990).

[11] Rushworth, *Tryal*, ep. ded. Rushworth's charitable words here and elsewhere in the work are to be explained mostly by the fact that the book is dedicated to the marquis of Halifax, who was a nephew of Strafford.

Loftus 'was sullyed by an amour... betwixt him and his daughter'. This was a libel repeated by Clarendon, and not finally rejected by scholars until subjected to the meticulous attention of S. R. Gardiner in the later nineteenth century. Warwick was approving of Strafford's rule in Ireland, stressing his justice, although again reflecting that 'his haughtines to amplifie his authority' had undone some of this good work. More generally, he saw and approved a policy of Anglicisation: Strafford had successfully attempted 'to regulate the Irish Church unto the English', and more generally, 'like a good English-man' he had sought to keep Ireland dependent on England.[12]

II

The following century was to see further hot dispute among historians over Strafford's career, but for the first time Strafford's own descendants began to play a more determined role in acting to safeguard their illustrious forebear's reputation. Wentworth's son and heir, William, seems to have been obsessively concerned with preserving his father's memory, putting up one monument to him and leaving £1,000 in his will for another in York Minster. Strafford's eighteenth-century descendants would appear to have shared these concerns. Rushworth's volume on Strafford's trial, and the character sketches in Clarendon and Warwick's works were carefully tracked down and noted by family members when they emerged from the press, while Warwick's references to 'my Lord Straffords amours' drew hostile comment from the family as 'a lessening to his memory'.[13]

But it was Strafford's great-grandson, the earl of Malton (later first marquis of Rockingham) who was most of all preoccupied with the memory of the first earl of Strafford, perhaps as a way of boosting his own political career by this association. The revival of Strafford's reputation was intended to be achieved in part by the final publication of material from Strafford's surviving collection of correspondence.

The survival of Strafford's papers is one of the most fortunate

[12] G. Huehns (ed.), *Clarendon. Selections from the 'History of the Rebellion' & 'The Life by Himself'* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 146–7; Sir Philip Warwick, *Memoires* (1701), pp. 109–17; Gardiner, IX, 71.

[13] Wedgwood, p. 395; J. J. Cartwright (ed.), *The Wentworth Papers, 1705–1739* (1883), pp. 100–1.

accidents for historians of the seventeenth century. Strafford's son, William, apparently preserved the Strafford papers in the stone tower of the family seat of Wentworth Woodhouse in Yorkshire, where they later, particularly fortunately came to the attention of the famous eighteenth-century antiquary, William Oldys. Oldys seems to have spent the period 1724–30 in Yorkshire, mostly at Wentworth Woodhouse, the seat of Strafford's descendant the earl of Malton 'with whom he had been intimate in his youth'. It is quite possible that Oldys may have overseen the organisation of Strafford's correspondence into the form in which it now survives. In 1729 Oldys wrote an 'Essay on Epistolary Writings, with respect to the Grand Collection of Thomas, earl of Strafford' dedicated to the earl of Malton, and it has been plausibly suggested that Oldys assisted Malton's chaplain, William Knowler, in preparing the latter's much-cited edition of Strafford's correspondence.[14]

It is Knowler's two-volume collection of materials from the Strafford papers which has remained the single most important published source for Strafford's life down to very recent times. But this was not intended to be a dispassionate historical selection. It was Malton's intention that extracts from Strafford's papers should be published according to certain specified criteria. Knowler's dedicatory epistle spelled out Malton's involvement in the enterprise in unambiguous terms. The published letters had been 'selected from a vast Treasure of curious Manuscripts by Your Self, and published according to your Lordship's own Directions and Instructions, to vindicate his [Strafford's] Memory from those Aspersions, which it is grown too fashionable to cast upon him, of acting upon Arbitrary Principles, and being a Friend to Roman Catholicks'. Knowler's references to Malton's involvement were no polite fiction. When one Henry Goddard sent Knowler a number of transcribed letters by Strafford for possible inclusion in the forthcoming edition, Knowler duly presented a list of them to Malton. The earl, 'upon consulting his books over again found every one of them, & told me [Knowler], He had passed them over by design, & did not think them proper to be made publick at present'. Malton was certainly very jealous of his forebear's reputation. Indeed, Oldys suggested that one possible reason for Malton's deliberate burning of the papers of the antiquary Richard Gascoigne (who had laboriously composed pedigrees of the

[14] J. Yeowell (ed.), *A Literary Antiquary. Memoir of William Oldys, Esq.* (1862), pp. vii, viii–x; *DNB*, s.n. 'William Oldys' and 'William Knowler'.

Wentworth family) was that the papers might contain something derogatory to the first earl of Strafford.[15]

Nevertheless, despite Malton's anxieties and interference, it is important to emphasise that Knowler's selection does not simply present a sanitised, pro-Strafford account. While Knowler undoubtedly did omit many letters that cast Wentworth in a bad light, there is still a good deal of potentially 'incriminating' material in what remains. Indeed, one of Strafford's most violent nineteenth-century critics declared that 'the family of Lord Strafford have done his Lordship's memory a most irreparable injury, by the publication of his letters, which afford such a mass of evidence of his rapacity, rancour, utter disregard of the ties of honour and justice, inhumanity, hypocrisy, and Machiavellianism, as has rarely been bequeathed to posterity'.[16] The fact that parts of the Knowler edition have been read in this light has tended to give historians the impression that Knowler's volumes represent a virtually complete edition of the important materials among the papers.

However, not only were some inflammatory letters dropped altogether, but Knowler often omitted significant sections from other letters without warning, especially if they took the form of indiscreet postscripts and endpapers. In the case of Laud's correspondence with Wentworth, this could seriously mar understandings of what was written. The main body of their letters was sometimes deliberately bland so as to mislead anyone who might intercept the correspondence. More pungent observations were kept for endpapers, which could be treated separately and burned if necessary. Some of these endpapers may also have been omitted because Knowler generally seems to have avoided letters containing large amounts of cipher. The tendency to avoid passages in cipher may also explain the omission of many of the letters detailing Strafford's remorseless hunting down of the earl of Cork, although Knowler later confessed

[15] Knowler, I, dedicatory epistle; C. H. Firth (ed.), 'Papers relating to Thomas Wentworth, First Earl of Strafford, from the MSS of Dr William Knowler', *Camden Miscellany* 9 (1895), pp. vi, xi; *DNB*, s.n. 'Richard Gascoigne'. For a few useful details of the career and activities of Malton, later the first marquis of Rockingham, see M. Bloy, 'Rockingham and Yorkshire. The political, economic and social role of Charles Watson-Wentworth, the second Marquess of Rockingham' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Sheffield, 1986), ch. 1. Note also Malton's notes on aspects of Strafford's life and letters in Str P 40/67, 70, 85. Knowler describes in a later letter to the second marquis how, having copied out the letters, he used to present them to Malton 'who read every one of them over to his Lady & me, when he had an Evening at Leisure and without Company': Str P 40/74.

[16] M. Carey, *Vindiciae Hibernicae* (3rd edn, Philadelphia, 1837), p. 177.

that in his edition 'there was a Tenderness shown to the Howards and the Boyles'.[17]

That much significant material was missed out of the Knowler volume was recognised by the editor himself. Thirty years after the original publication, Knowler, now an old man of seventy, wrote to the second marquis of Rockingham urging that an edition of Strafford's full correspondence should be considered. He stated frankly that the earlier collection had been intended to be only a 'Specimen', and that rich collections of sources, particularly the correspondence of Strafford with Laud, deserved to be published as part of a full edition which 'would be the greatest Honour to your noble Ancestor'. Nothing further seems to have come of these proposals. The prohibitive cost of the proposed enterprise, together with the death of Knowler a few years later, presumably helped to stifle the plans, although the Rockinghams may also have entertained some misgivings about allowing the full collection into the public domain.[18]

Whatever the shortcomings of the Knowler edition, however, it rapidly became and has remained the standard historical source for Strafford's career, and an important resource for broader studies of the Personal Rule. It was therefore consulted by later eighteenth-century historians such as Hume, Oldmixon and Carte, although both Carte in his *Life of Ormond* (1735) and the author of the article on Strafford printed in the 1766 *Biographia Britannica* also published a number of other minor surviving letters by Strafford.[19]

It was David Hume, however, who first used the Knowler letters as part of a more sympathetic portrait of Strafford and his policies. Hume's *History of Great Britain* was a deeply unfashionable work, propelled in part by a distaste for 'enthusiasm' and many of the traditional parliamentary heroes, and a desire to understand and forgive the policies of Charles I. Self-confessedly 'Tory as to persons and Whig as to things', Hume praised Strafford as 'one of the most eminent persons that has appeared in England'. As a consequence, Hume found himself assailed by all sides: 'English, Scotch and Irish;

[17] Knowler to the 2nd marquis of Rockingham (n.d.), Str P 40/74. On the Laud–Wentworth correspondence see my discussion in chapter 5 below. Some useful examples of omitted endpapers can be studied by comparing versions of Laud's letters in the nineteenth-century edition of his *Works* in volume VI (transcribed from Knowler) and volume VII (transcribed from the originals).

[18] Str P 40/72–6.

[19] Robert Browning, *Prose Life of Strafford* (1892), p. lxxi.

Whig and Tory; churchman and sectary, freethinker and religionist; patriot and courtier, united in their rage against the man who had presumed to shed a generous tear for the fate of Charles I and the Earl of Strafford'. But Hume was not quite as solitary a figure as he chose to present himself, on this matter at any rate. Carte, in his *Life of Ormond*, had also sounded a highly positive note in his treatment of Strafford.

With the coming of the French Revolution, there was an increasing vogue for Strafford in royalist circles on both sides of the Channel. Inevitably, parallels began to be drawn between events in France and the advent of the English Civil War. Indeed an extraordinary Strafford cult seems to have developed among French conservatives both before and in the wake of the Revolution. In particular, they seized on the stern warnings that Strafford's story offered of the self-destructive perils to be incurred by yielding to popular pressure. Remarkably enough, it was from this group of French exiles that the first ever full-length biography of Strafford emerged. Its author was the comte de Lally Tollendal, who had already composed a tragedy *Le Comte de Strafford*, containing explicit reference to its parallel with the royal sacrifice of the comte's own father. The play was printed in London in 1795, and was followed by a full biography of Strafford in French by the same author. This made copious use of Knowler's edition of Strafford's letters and was published by the subscription of a number of those prominent in English political life as well as exiled French ex-ministers. This 'rehabilitation' of Strafford was opposed by both French and English historians alike, including Catherine Macaulay and Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville, all of them conscious of the strong resonance that these historical interpretations had for contemporary political conflicts.[20]

III

The nineteenth century saw a notable expansion, both in available materials for the study of Strafford's career, and in the acuity of the

[20] Richardson, *Debate*, pp. 45–8; Kearney, *Strafford*, 2nd edn, p. xiii; Trophime Gerard de Lally Tollendal, *Le Comte de Strafford: tragedie en cinq actes* (1795); Trophime Gerard de Lally Tollendal, *Essai sur la vie de Thomas Wentworth, Comte de Strafford* (1796; 2nd edn, 1814); L. L. Bongie, *David Hume, Prophet of Counter-Revolution* (Oxford, 1965), esp. pp. xiii, 13–14, 104–5 n.4, 108–9. I am grateful to Dr Linda Kirk for drawing Bongie's work to my attention. For a vehement attack on Lally Tolendal's work by a later poet who was similarly drawn to compose both a tragedy and a biography of Strafford, see Browning, *Life*, p. 5n.